

**Education Committee
Wednesday, March 15, 2023**

House Bill 6881: An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators - Support

Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and members of the Education Committee:

My name is Cindy Giamatti and I am a resident of Burlington. I work as a Paraeducator in the East Haven School District at the Joseph Melillo Middle School. I offer the following testimony in support of HB 6881: An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators:

I have been working as a Para for many years, during the many years, the job has changed and evolved in so many ways. We have taken on many parental responsibilities, behavior issues, as well as social and emotional issues. I am currently the president of my district's Para union, we are represented by CSEA, so I am privy to the many issues and problems that occur daily.

I work for a district that doesn't pay a livable wage. I make \$2 above minimum wage and I am at the high end of the pay scale; some of my Paras make just over \$15 an hour. We have no health care, or retirement benefits. We have limited, if any training. We don't even get one paid holiday.

When it comes to attending PPTs, that is non-existent. I have advocated for our paras to attend PPTs for many years and I always get the same response: it is a legal meeting and paras will probably not know what or how to present information. Basically, being told we are not professional or smart enough to attend these meetings, even though we have the most critical information. I responded, simply: provide training for us. Which, by the way, never happened. I am not even sure if my district informs parents they can request a para to attend.

Moving on to IEPs, there again limited to no access. I have advocated for access to PowerSchool for this purpose and others, only to be denied time and time again. We are not allowed anything of substance on a professional level even though they put more responsibility on us with no training, quality pay or consideration.

It's obvious that with all that I just mentioned, we can't attract any new applicants. We are currently down over 20 Paras in my district! With these kinds of shortages, we are taking on more and more, while covering classes daily. And, these shortages mean we are out of IEP compliance on a daily basis. We are all overwhelmed all the time. Unfortunately, when we do hire a new applicant, they don't last very long. They are basically thrown to the wolves not knowing what a para does, or anything about our role. It becomes overwhelming. I might add when we cover for a teacher, we

are only paid \$6 a class. If a certified teacher is covering in the room next to me they are making upward of \$40 a class for doing the same job.

We are the unsung heroes in the schools and work directly with the students more than anybody else in the building. Simply put, we put in more hours with them daily than most. Handling the behaviors, the emotional issues, personal care and everything in between.

We love our kids, that is why we stay. We are a critical component to a functioning school, and we need and deserve better. House Bill 6881 is a step in the right direction and I urge you to support it.

Thank You,

Cindy Giammatti
East Haven CT.